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Ida A. Husted Harper

Journalist, Author, and Suffragist

¹ Harper, *Woman's Work for Woman*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902), 100.

² "Harper, Ida A. Husted," *The Independent Democrat* (San Diego, Calif.), 11, 1902.

³ Harper, *Woman's Work for Woman*, 100.

⁴ "Ida A. Husted," *The Independent Democrat* (San Diego, Calif.), 11, 1902.

⁵ "Ida A. Husted," *The Independent Democrat* (San Diego, Calif.), 11, 1902.

Publicity was an important part of spreading the philosophy of the woman's suffrage in the late 1890's and early 1900's, and Ida A. Husted Harper, publicist for the National American Woman Suffrage Association and chosen by Susan B. Anthony to be her biographer, played an important role in spreading this philosophy locally, nationally, and internationally.¹ She is remembered for her writings for and about women and for her contributions to the documentation of the woman suffrage movement.² Witty and knowledgeable, Harper wrote with a skill that would enable her to share her message with women all over the world.

Ida A. Husted was born on February 18, 1851 in Fairfield, Indiana. After graduating from Muncie High School in 1868, Harper attended Indiana University in Bloomington for a year. She was principal and teacher in Peru, Indiana during the 1870-71 school year. In 1871 she married Thomas Harper, and shortly after moved to Terre Haute, Indiana.³

Newly married and new to Terre Haute, Harper began writing partially as a relief from the isolation of domestic life. She wrote her first article for the Saturday Evening Mail, in Terre Haute, under the pseudonym of "Mrs. John Smith" in 1872. Her first articles were a response to editorial columns in the Saturday Evening Mail that were written by anonymous male contributors. Her commentaries addressed women's issues from a woman's point of view, issues such as woman's suffrage, financial independence for women, economic and social rights. In 1878 Harper was offered a regular column with the Saturday Evening Mail entitled "A Woman's Opinions." Her columns often dealt with women's political rights.⁴

¹ DuBois, Ellen, *Votes for Women: a 7th Anniversary Album* (San Marion, Calif. : Huntington Library, 1995) p. 42.

² "Harper, Ida A. Husted," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* October 11, 2002
(<http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=138073>)

³ Daily, Gary W., *Ida Husted Harper* (Supported by an Indiana Heritage Research Grant : a joint effort of the Indiana Historical Society and the Indiana Committee for the Humanities) p. 2-3.

⁴ Dehler, Susan J., "Alias Mrs. John Smith," *Terre Haute Tribune-Star* (March 6, 1988, Section H, p. 1).

Harper was instrumental in creating and promoting the image of Susan B. Anthony. After her marriage ended in 1890, she moved to Indianapolis, Indiana where she wrote articles for the Indianapolis News. Although no cause for her divorce was specifically discussed in any of the sources I consulted, I suspect her defiant attitude had a lot to do with her marriage ending. When she was asked to contribute regularly to the Saturday Evening Mail her husband told her that he was willing to allow her to do so as long as she did not receive payment for it. She then notified the editor, Mr. Perry S. Westfall, that she would "accept his proposition, including the pay."¹¹ In an article she wrote for the Saturday Evening Mail, Harper describes why women marry. According to her women marry "first, for love; second, to be supported; third, to avoid the reproach of being an old maid." She suggests that "when women become thoroughly independent financially there will be quite a change in the matrimonial market." When a woman can stand on her own two feet she can approach marriage "calmly and critically."¹² These types of views, as well as her growing commitment to women's rights, may have placed a strain on her marriage.

Later Harper moved to California to attend Leland Stanford University in 1893. It was while living in California that she became reacquainted with Susan B. Anthony in 1896 and was asked to handle the press coverage for a suffrage amendment campaign to the state convention.¹³ It was because of her work during this campaign that she was asked by Susan B. Anthony to become her biographer.¹⁴ Harper had been a professional newspaperwoman, writing for the Indianapolis News. During the campaign, she and Anthony visited the newspaper offices of San

¹¹ Daily, Gary W., *Ida Husted Harper* (Supported by an Indiana Heritage Research Grant : a joint effort of the Indiana Historical Society and the Indiana Committee for the Humanities) p. 2-3.

¹² Harper, Ida A., "Women and Matrimony," *Saturday Evening Mail* (June 14, 1884 , p. 1)

¹³ Dehler, Susan J., "Alias Mrs. John Smith," *Terre Haute Tribune-Star* (March 6, 1988, Section H, p. 1).

¹⁴ "Harper, Ida A. Husted," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* (October 11, 2002, <http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=138073>)

Francisco “to bespeak the respect and courtesy of the all-powerful editors.” Anthony soon realized that Harper knew her trade and placed the campaign publicity entirely in her hands. Anthony recognized Harper’s ability and skill as a writer, which is most likely why she was chosen to write Anthony’s biography.¹⁵

In March of 1897, Ida Husted Harper moved in to the residence of Susan B. Anthony to write her biography. She lived with Anthony for two years while writing the biography and. Anthony had a great deal of respect for her.¹⁶

According to Sara Hunter Graham in her book Women Suffrage and the New Democracy “Ida Husted Harper was in part responsible for Anthony’s transformation from reviled fanatic to adored leader.” Harper’s first two volumes of The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony were published in 1898, and the third volume was published following Anthony’s death in 1906. Harper’s portrayal of Anthony helped to replace the stereotypical image of the masculinized fanatic with a nonthreatening feminine heroine full of domestic virtue.¹⁷

In 1899 Harper traveled, with Anthony, to London as a delegate to the International Council of Women. She attended most of the European meetings of the Council and the International Woman’s Suffrage Alliance.¹⁸ She traveled across the United States, lecturing and writing to promote the woman’s suffrage cause.¹⁹

Ida Husted Harper played an important role in spreading the woman’s suffrage cause nationally and internationally. She chaired the press committee of the International Council of

¹⁵ Anthony, Katharine, *Susan B. Anthony: Her Personal History and Her Era* (Garden City, New York : Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1954) p. 443.

¹⁶ Anthony, *Susan B. Anthony*, p. 446.

¹⁷ Graham, Sara Hunter, *Woman Suffrage and the New Democracy* (New Haven & London : Yale University, 1996. Printed in the United States of America by Vail-Ballou Press, Binghamton, New York) p. 47-48.

¹⁸ “Ida Husted Harper,” *Dictionary of American Biography Base Set* (American Council of Learned Societies, 1928-1936. Reproduced in Biography Resource Center, Farmington Hills, Mich. : The Gale Group, 2002. <http://www.galnet.com/servlet/BioRC>).

¹⁹ Daily, Gary W., *Ida Husted Harper*. (Supported by an Indiana Heritage Research Grant, a joint effort of the Indiana Historical Society and the Indiana Committee for the Humanities) p. 1.

Women from 1899 to 1902. She edited a woman's column in the New York Sunday Sun 1899-1903, the woman's page in Harper's Bazaar in 1909, and was a correspondent for newspapers in Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and New York City. Many supporters of suffrage believed that women were subject to the forces of evolution and were making progress through the ages. Writers such as Harper drew on this theory of female evolution, publicizing it widely in articles and pamphlets. In an article Harper wrote for the North American Review she traced the history of franchise in America and pointed out that religious, property, educational, and racial qualifications had been abandoned for male Americans. She discussed the changing status of women from Colonial times to the twentieth century, a result of legal reforms and educational advancements. She found that the most decisive evidence of progress was in the area of education, when in 1902 more girls were enrolled in schools than boys, and more than a third of all college students were female. Her findings presented the evolution of American women to an audience eager to believe in progress.²⁰ An article Harper had written for the June 7, 1879 Saturday Evening Mail, titled "We and Our Grandmothers," suggested that the circumstances of women's lives had changed radically and that women had changed as well. Women were in school "elementary, high school, and, increasingly, college." Women were holding down jobs in factories and in professions that did not exist previously.²¹

Ida Husted Harper was actively involved in promoting women's rights. In 1904, Harper again served as delegate to the International Council of Women held in Berlin.²² In America

²⁰ Graham, Sara Hunter, *Woman Suffrage and the New Democracy* (New Haven & London : Yale University Press, 1996. Printed in the United States of America by Vail-Ballou Press, Binghamton, New York) p. 42.

²¹ Daily, Gary W., *Ida Husted Harper* (Supported by an Indiana Heritage Research Grant, a joint effort of the Indiana Historical Society and the Indiana Committee for the Humanities) p. 2-3.

²² "Harper, Ida A. Husted, *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* (October 11, 2002, <<http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=138073>>).

many suffragists, including Harper, felt that American politics was in need of uplifting and that women were exceptionally equipped to do the job.²³

Harper, speaking on enfranchisement for women, made these comments about the American electorate in 1904, "consider what it has received during the past thirty-five years from the majority of Negroes, Indians and immigrants who have been enfranchised during that time, and then judge whether women as a body, could not bring something to offset these last acquisitions." "Those who fear the foreign vote and the colored vote should remember that there are more native-born women in the United States."²⁴

In 1909 Carrie Chapman Catt, while attending a meeting of the London Society for Women's Suffrage, suggested that a dynamic public relations campaign was needed to promote the movement in the United States and named Ida Husted Harper to head a press department.²⁵ Catt's philosophy differed somewhat from that of Anthony, but Harper, who was flexible and open minded, was able to make the transition into this new role.

In 1916 Harper was appointed by Catt to head the newly formed Leslie Bureau of Suffrage Education within the NAWSA. "The steady stream of letters, articles, and pamphlets that issued from her office in Washington, D.C. played a large role in the successful campaign for passage of the Nineteenth Amendment."²⁶ Harper was in charge of the editorial correspondence department. She wrote editorials, and "answered attacks mounted by anti-suffragists."²⁷

²³ Grimes, Alan P., *The Puritan Ethic and Woman Suffrage* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1967) p. 134-135.

²⁴ Grimes, Alan P., *The Puritan Ethic and Woman Suffrage* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1967) p. 135.

²⁵ Van Voris, Jacqueline, *Carrie Chapman Catt: a Public Life* (New York : The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1987) p. 77.

²⁶ "Harper, Ida A. Husted," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* (October 11, 2002, <http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=138073>).

²⁷ Graham, Sara Hunter, *Woman Suffrage and the New Democracy* (New Haven & London : Yale University Press, 1996. Printed in the United States of America by Vail-Ballou Press, Binghamton, New York) p. 95.

In the early part of 1916 Laura Clay submitted a proposal for a bill, a variation of a previous proposal, requesting the franchise that would give women the right to vote. Harper assisted Clay in interviewing a number of congressmen about their general attitudes on suffrage and particularly about Clay's bill. The proposal was referred to the Committee on Privileges and Elections, but never materialized.²⁸

On February 25, 1917, as the United States prepared to enter World War I, Harper read a letter (which was composed by the members of the NAWSA) at a public meeting offering "women's services to the government of the United States in the event they should be needed, and in so far as we are authorized, we pledge the loyal support of our more than two million members." The letter was given to Secretary of War Baker who passed it on to the president.²⁹

Harper's skill as a writer and her journalistic experience enabled her to give much aid to the suffrage campaign through the press, and in the years immediately preceding the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Federal Constitution she was in charge of publicity for the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Harper assisted Anthony in preparing the fourth volume of The History of Woman Suffrage, and in 1922 published volumes five and six. Her final days were spent in Washington D.C. where she died of a cerebral hemorrhage in 1931.³⁰

Ida A. Husted Harper was important to the woman's suffrage campaign, not only for her contributions of publicizing woman's suffrage issues, her biography of Susan B. Anthony, her work on and editorship of The History of Woman Suffrage, and her efforts to gain the vote for

²⁸ Fuller, Paul E., *Laura Clay and the Woman's Rights Movement* (Lexington, Kentucky : The University Press of Kentucky, 1975) p. 144.

²⁹ Van Voris, Jacqueline, *Carrie Chapman Catt: a Public Life* (New York : The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1987) p. 138.

³⁰ "Ida Husted Harper," *Dictionary of American Biography Base Set* (American Council of Learned Societies, 1928-1936. Reproduced in Biography Resource Center. Farmington Hills, Mich. : The Gale Group, 2002 <http://www.galnet.com/servlet/BioRC>).

women, but for her writing ability and expertise which contributed largely to the success of the campaign. Her commitment to women's rights, her writing skills, and her ability to publicize widely woman's suffrage philosophy has earned her a place in history.

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